

Three Conversations on The Binding/Sacrifice of Isaac/Ishmael in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition

The purpose of the three conversations is to explore how a single story, the story of Abraham's near sacrifice of his son, is received in the three Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The story is troubling and challenging for the modern reader, yet it has been important in the three faiths. Though there has been a competitive element in the way each faith has developed the story, we will not be concerned with deciding who got it right and who got it wrong, but with sympathetically inhabiting each iteration, and understanding the ideas and values each retelling is meant to convey. In this way we will try to develop an appreciation of how each faith uses its sacred texts, how it thinks with Scripture.

Each conversation will be structured in the same way. It will be chaired by Professor Philip Alexander, who will lead a discussion on the texts provided in the dossier below. To get the most out of the session you should read the texts in advance, think about them, and come with questions. These texts present in each case a classic, traditional reading of the story. This will then be followed by a discussion of the relevance of the story today, led by a member of each faith community. At the end of the third conversation Professor Alexander will chair a discussion comparing and contrasting the three traditions: in what ways are they different, in what ways are they similar?

FIRST CONVERSATION

1. Judaism

1.1 Genesis 22:1-19

¹And it came to pass after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him: "Abraham"; and he said: "Here am I." ²And He said: "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, even Isaac, and get you into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you of."

³And Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him. And Isaac his son; and he chopped the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went to the place of which God had told him. ⁴On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. ⁵And Abraham said to his young men: "Abide here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, and come back to you." ⁶And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife; and they went both of them together.

⁷And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father, and said: "My father." And he said: "Here am I, my son." And he said: "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" ⁸And Abraham said: "God will provide Himself [Hebrew *yir'eh*; that is, *see for Himself*] the lamb for the burnt-offering, my son." So they went both of them together. ⁹And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. ¹⁰And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

¹¹And the angel of the Lord called to him out of heaven, and said: "Abraham, Abraham." And he said: "Here am I." ¹²And he said: "Lay not your hand on the lad, neither do anything to him; for now I

know that you are a God-fearing man, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.”

¹³And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. And Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt-offering instead of his son. ¹⁴And Abraham called the name of that place Adonai-yireh [i.e., *The Lord sees*]; as it is said to this day: “In the mount where the Lord is seen.”

¹⁵And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham a second time out of heaven, ¹⁶and said: “By Myself have I sworn,” says the Lord, “because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷that in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; ¹⁸and in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because you have hearkened to My voice.”

¹⁹So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose up and went to Beer-sheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba. (JPS 1917 version, slightly modernized)

1.2 Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis 22:1-19 (trans. Alexander)

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan is an Aramaic paraphrase of the Torah. There is debate as to when and where it was produced but a widely accepted view dates it to 8th century Israel/Palestine. In the form in which we have it, it shows clear knowledge of Islam. It neatly summarizes much of earlier Jewish understanding of the Binding of Isaac.

***Italics* = Biblical text**

underlining = ‘non-literal’ translation of Biblical text

1. *And it came to pass after these things* – after Isaac and Ishmael had quarrelled. Ishmael said: “It is right for me to be the heir of my father, since I am his firstborn son;” while Isaac said: “It is right for me to be the heir of my father, since I am the son of Sarah his wife, but you are the son of Hagar, the handmaid of my mother.” Ishmael answered and said: “I am more righteous than you, because I was circumcised when I was thirteen years old; and if I had wanted to refuse, I would not have allowed myself to be circumcised. But you were circumcised when eight days old. If you had knowledge, perhaps you would not have allowed yourself to be circumcised.” Isaac answered and said: “Behold, I am thirty-seven years old this day. If the Holy One, blessed be he, were to demand all my limbs, I would not refuse.” Immediately the Word of *the Lord tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham”; and he said, “Here am I.”*

2. *He said: “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, even Isaac, and go into the land of worship; and offer him up there for a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I will tell you of.”*

3. *Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his ass, and took with him his two young men, Eliezer and Ishmael, as well as Isaac his son. He chopped the wood of the olive, the fig and the palm, which are proper for the burnt offering, and he rose up and went to the place of which the Lord had told him.*

4. *On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the cloud of glory smoking on the mountain, and he recognized it from afar.*

5. *Abraham said to his young men: "Wait here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder to find out if what was promised – 'So shall your seed be' (Gen. 15:5) – will ever be fulfilled. We will worship the Lord of the universe, and come again to you."*
6. *Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, laid it upon Isaac his son, took in his hand the fire and the knife, and both of them went together.*
7. *Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "Father", and he said, "Here am I, my son". Isaac said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"*
8. *Abraham said: "The Lord will choose for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So both of them went with a perfect heart together.*
9. *They came to the place which God had told him of. Abraham built there the altar which Adam had built, but which had been destroyed in the waters of the Flood. Noah had rebuilt it, but it was again destroyed in the generation of the division of tongues (Gen. 11:9-11). Abraham set in order the wood upon it, bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.*
10. *Then Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to sacrifice his son. Isaac answered and said to his father: "Bind me well so that I may not struggle in the anguish of my soul, lest a blemish be found in your offering, and I be cast into the pit of destruction." The eyes of Abraham looked at the eyes of Isaac, but the eyes of Isaac looked at the angels on high: Isaac saw them, but Abraham did not see them. The angels on high answered: "Come and see these two unique men in the earth. One sacrifices and the other is his victim: the one who sacrifices does not hesitate, the one to be sacrificed stretches out his neck."*
11. *The angel of the Lord called to Abraham out of heaven and said to him, "Abraham, Abraham," and he said, "Here am I."*
12. *He said: "Do not lay your hand upon the lad, nor do him any harm, for it is now revealed before me that you fear the Lord, and that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."*
13. *Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold a ram – one that had been created on the evening when the work of creation was finished – caught in the branches of a tree by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.*
14. *Abraham gave thanks and prayed there in that place, and said: "I beseech you by the mercy that is before you, O Lord: it is revealed before you that there was no insincerity in my heart, but I sought to perform your decree with joy; so when the descendants of Isaac my son shall come to the time of distress, remember them, hear their supplications, and deliver them, and all generations to come will say, 'In this mountain Abraham bound Isaac, his son, and there the Shekhinah of the Lord was revealed to him.'"*
15. *The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven,*
16. *and said: "By my Word (Memra) I have sworn, says the Lord, that, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son,*
17. *I will surely bless you and I will multiply your sons as the stars of the heaven and as the sand on the sea-shore; and your sons shall inherit the cities of their enemies.*
18. *Because of the merit of your sons all the people of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."*

19. And the angels from on high took Isaac and brought him to the school of Shem the Great, and he was there for three years. *And on the same day Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt in Beer-Sheba.*

SECOND CONVERSATION

2. Christianity

2.1 New Testament

2.1.1 Direct references

[1] Hebrews 11:17-19

¹⁷By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, ¹⁸of whom he had been told, “It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named after you” [Genesis 21:17]. ¹⁹He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead – and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

[2] James 2:21-23

²¹Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. ²³Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” [Genesis 15:6], and he was called the friend of God.

2.1.2 Possible allusions

[3] Matthew 3:16-17

¹⁶And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up out of the water, suddenly the heavens opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved son, with whom I am well-pleased.”

[4] John 8:56

Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.

[5] Romans 8:31-32

³¹What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?

[6] Galatians 3:16

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his seed; it does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many; but it says, “And to your seed,” that is, to one person, who is Christ [Genesis 12:7; cf. 22:18].

2.2 The Fathers of the Church

The Fathers of the Church are important Christian writers writing before the rise of Islam. Most of the extracts below are taken from the Homilies (Sermons) on Genesis by Origen (c.184 to c.253). Origen was head of a famous Christian school in Caesarea Maritima on the coast of Israel/Palestine. He was almost certainly in contact with Jewish scholars who lived in the same town, and shows knowledge of Jewish interpretations of the Tanakh. His Homilies were written originally in Greek, but survive only in the Latin translation of Rufinus. The extracts are adapted from the English translation of Ronald E.

Heine, published in the series Fathers of the Church (1982). John Chrysostom (c.349-407) is the most famous Homilist of the early Church. His eloquence was legendary and earned him the nick-name "Golden Mouth" (Chrysostomos). After a period in Antioch in Syria he became Archbishop of Constantinople. Some of his writings are deeply anti-Jewish and he was a major influence on fostering anti-Jewish attitudes in the Church. The translation is from his Homilies on Genesis, which survive in their original Greek. It is adapted from the translation by Robert C. Hill, published in the series Fathers of the Church (2006). Caesarius (468/470-542), Bishop of Arles in Gaul (France) was one of the most important figures on the western Latin Church in the 6th century. Like Chrysostom, he was a noted preacher. The extract is from one of his many surviving sermons. It is adapted from the English translation by Sr Mary Magdeleine Mueller, published in the series Fathers of the Church (1964).

22:1

[1] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis 8.1*: Give your attention, you who have approached God – who believe yourselves to be faithful. Consider diligently how the faith of the faithful is proved from these words that have been read to us. "And it came to pass," the text says, "after these words, God tested Abraham and said to him: 'Abraham, Abraham.'" And he said, 'Here, I am.'" Observe each detail that has been written. For if one knows how to dig into the depth, he will find a treasure in the details, and perhaps also the precious jewels of the mysteries lie hidden where they are not esteemed.

[2] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis 8.1*: Abraham hoped for the resurrection of Isaac and believed in a future that had not yet happened. How then are they "sons of Abraham" [John 8:37] who do not believe what has happened in Christ, which Abraham believed was to be in Isaac? No rather, that I may speak more clearly. Abraham knew himself to prefigure the image of future truth. He knew that Christ was to be born from his seed, who also was to be offered as a truer victim for the whole world and was to be raised from the dead.

22:2

[3] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis 8.2*: "Take," therefore, the text says, "your dearest son Isaac, whom you love." Let it be, Lord, that you are reminding the father of the "son"; yet you add "dearest," whom you are commanding to be slain. Let this be sufficient for the father's torment. You add again also, "whom you love." Let the triple torment of the father be in this. Why is there need yet that you bring to mind also "Isaac"? Did Abraham not know that that dearest son of his, that one whom he loved, was called Isaac? But why is it added at this time? That Abraham might recall that you had said to him, "In Isaac shall your seed be called, and that in Isaac the promises shall be yours" [Genesis 21:12]. The reminder of the name also produces hopelessness in the promises that were made under this name. But all these things happened because God was testing Abraham.

[4] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis 8.3-4*: The journey and furthermore the ascent of the mountain is enjoined, that in all these things there might be a period of struggle between affection and faith, love of God and love of the flesh, the charm of things present and the expectation of things to come. He is sent therefore "into the high land", and the high land is not sufficient for a patriarch about to accomplish so great a work for the Lord. But he is also ordered to ascend a mountain, of course that, exalted by faith, he might abandon earthly things and ascend to things above. ... A journey is prolonged for three days, and during the whole three days the parent's heart is tormented with recurring anxieties, so that the father might consider the son in this whole lengthy period, that he

might partake of food with him, that the child might weigh in his father's embraces for so many nights, might cling to his breast, might lie in his bosom? Behold to what extent the test is heaped up!

22:4

[5] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis 8.4*: The third day, however, is always applied to mysteries. For when the people had departed from Egypt, they offer sacrifice to God on the third day and are purified on the third day [Exodus 19:11, 15-16; 24:5]. And the third day is the day of the Lord's resurrection [Matthew 27:63; Mark 8:31]. Many other mysteries are included within this day.

22:5

[6] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis 8.5*: Tell me, Abraham, are you saying to the servants in truth that you will worship and return with the child, or are you deceiving them? If you are telling the truth, then you will not make him a burnt offering. If you are deceiving, it is not fitting for so great a patriarch to deceive. What disposition therefore does this statement indicate in you? I am speaking the truth, he says, and I offer a child as a burnt-offering. For this reason I carry wood with me, and I return to you with him. For I believe, and this is my faith, that "God is able to raise him up even from the dead" [Hebrews 11:19].

22:6

[7] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis 8.6*: That Isaac carries on himself "the wood for the burnt offering" is a figure, because Christ also "himself carried his own cross" [John 19:17], and yet to carry "the wood for the burnt-offering" is the duty of a priest. He therefore becomes victim and priest. But what is added also is related to this: "And they went both of them together." For when Abraham carries the fire and the knife as if to sacrifice, Isaac does not go behind him but with him, that he might be shown to contribute equally with the priesthood itself.

22:8

[7] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis 8.6*: Abraham's response, sufficiently accurate and cautious, moves me. I do not know what he saw in his spirit, for he does not speak about the present but about the future: "God himself will provide himself a sheep." He responded to his son's inquiry about present things with future things. For "the Lord himself will provide himself a sheep" in Christ.

22:12

[8] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis 8.8*: In this statement it is usually thrown out against us that God says that "now" he has learned that Abraham fears God, as though he were such as not to have known previously. God knew, and it was not hidden from him, since it is he "who has known all things before they come to pass" [Susanna 42 (Daniel 13:42)]. But these things are written on account of you, because, because you too indeed have believed in God. But unless you fulfill "the works of faith" [2 Thessalonians 1:11], unless you are obedient to all the commandments, even the more difficult ones, unless you offer sacrifice and show that you place neither father nor mother nor sons before God, you will not know that you fear God. Now will it be said of you, "Now I know that you fear God."

22:13

[9] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis 8.9*: We said above, I think, that Isaac represented Christ. But this ram no less also seems to represent Christ. Now it is worthwhile to know how both are appropriate to Christ, both Isaac, who is not slain, and the ram, which is slain.

.... Christ is “the Word of God,” but “the Word was made flesh” [John 1:14]. One aspect of Christ therefore is from above; the other is received from human nature and the womb of the Virgin. Christ suffered, therefore, but in the flesh, of which this ram is a type, as also John said: “Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sin of the world” [John 1:29]. But the Word continued “in incorruption” [1 Corinthians 15:42], which is Christ according to the spirit, of which Isaac is the image. For this reason he is victim and priest. For truly according to the spirit, of which Isaac is the image, he offers the victim to the Father, but according to the flesh he himself is offered on the altar of the cross. As it is said of him, “Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sin of the world” [John 1:29], so it is said of him, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” [Psalm 110:4 (109:4 LXX)].

[10] Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 47.14*: All this, however, happened as a type of the cross. Hence Christ too said to the Jews, “Your father Abraham rejoiced in anticipation of seeing my day; he saw it and was delighted” [John 8: 56]. How did he see it if he lived so long before? In type, in shadow. Just as in our text the sheep was offered in place of Isaac, so here the rational Lamb was offered for the world. You see, it was necessary that the truth be sketched out ahead of time in shadow. Notice, I ask you, dearly beloved, how everything was prefigured in shadow: an only-begotten son in that case, an only-begotten in this; dearly beloved in that case, dearly beloved in this. “This is my beloved Son,” Scripture says in fact, “in whom I have found satisfaction” [Matthew 3:17]. The former was offered as a burnt offering by his father, and the latter his Father surrendered. Paul too shouts aloud in the words “He who in fact did not spare his own Son but handed him over for the sake of us all – how will he not also grant us every gift along with him?” [Romans 8:32]. Up to this point there is shadow, but now the truth of things is shown to be more excellent. This rational Lamb, you see, was offered for the whole world; he purified the whole world; he freed human beings from error and led them forward to the truth; he made earth into heaven, not by altering the nature of the elements but by transferring life in heaven to human beings on earth. Through him all worship of demons is made pointless; through him people no longer worship stone and wood. Nor do those endowed with reason bend the knee to material things – instead, all error has been abolished, and the light of truth has shone brightly on the world. Do you see the superiority of the truth? Do you see what the shadow is, on the one hand, and truth on the other?

[11] Caesarius of Arles, *Sermon 84.5*: Listen to another mystery. Blessed Jerome, a priest, wrote that he knew most certainly from the ancient Jews and elders that Christ our Lord was afterward crucified in the place where Isaac was offered. Last, from that place whence blessed Abraham was commanded to depart, he arrived on the third day at the place where Christ our Lord was crucified. This too is mentioned in the account of the ancients, that in the very place where the cross was fastened the first Adam once was buried [cf. 2 Esdras 3:21]. Moreover, it is called the place of Calvary for the very reason that the first head of the human race is said to have been buried there. Truly, brothers, not unfittingly is it believed that the physician was raised up where the sick man lay. It was right that divine mercy should bend down in the place where human pride had fallen.

22:17

[12] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis 14.1*: It is written in the prophet speaking in the person of the Lord, “I have used similitudes by the ministries of the prophets” [Hosea 12:10]. What this statement means is this: Although our Lord Jesus Christ is one in his substance and is nothing other than the Son of God, nevertheless he is represented as various and diverse in the figures and images of the Scripture.

For example, as I recall we have explained in what precedes that Christ himself was Isaac, in type, when he was offered as a holocaust. Nevertheless, the ram also represented him. I say furthermore that he exhibited also in the angel who spoke to Abraham and says to him, “Lay not your hand on the boy (Genesis 22:12)” For he says to him, “Because you have done this thing, I will surely bless you”.

He is said to be the sheep or the lamb that is sacrificed in the Passover [1 Corinthians 5:7], and he is designated as the shepherd of the sheep [John 10:11,14; Hebrews 13:20]. He is also described, no less, as the high priest who offers sacrifice [Hebrews 5:1-10].

22:18

[13] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis 14.1*: And to Abraham’s seed he promised – what? In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. His seed is Christ; because from Abraham came Isaac, from Isaac Jacob, from Jacob twelve sons, from these twelve the people of the Jews, from the people of the Jews, from the people of the Jews the Virgin Mary, from the Virgin Mary our Lord Jesus Christ. And what was promised to Abraham we find fulfilled among ourselves. In your seed, it says, shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. [cf. Galatians 3:16] He believed this before he had seen anything; and he never saw what was promised.

THIRD CONVERSATION

3. Islam

3.1 Qur’an 37(*al-Şāffāt*):99-113, trans. Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

⁹⁹And he [Abraham] said: “Truly I am going unto my Lord. He will guide me. ¹⁰⁰My Lord, give unto me from among the righteous.” ¹⁰¹So we gave him glad tidings of a gentle son. ¹⁰²When he had become old enough to partake of his father’s endeavours, Abraham said, “O my son! I see while dreaming that I am to sacrifice you. So consider, what do you see?” He replied, “O my father! Do as you are commanded. You will find me, God willing, among those who are patient.” ¹⁰³But when they had submitted and Abraham had laid him upon his forehead, ¹⁰⁴We called unto him, “O Abraham! ¹⁰⁵Thou hast been true to the vision.” Thus indeed do We recompense the virtuous. ¹⁰⁶Truly this was the manifest trial. ¹⁰⁷Then we ransomed him with a great sacrifice. ¹⁰⁸And we left [a blessing] upon him among later generations: ¹⁰⁹“Peace be upon Abraham.” ¹¹⁰Thus do we recompense the virtuous. ¹¹¹Truly he was among our believing servants. ¹¹²And we gave him glad tidings of Isaac, a prophet from among the righteous. ¹¹³And We blessed him and Isaac. And among their progeny are the virtuous and those who clearly wrong themselves.

3.2 Abu’l-Fidā’ Ismā’īl bin ‘Umar bin Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm* (Ibn Kathir’s *Tafsīr*) on Q 37:99-113

The Tafsīr of Ibn Kathīr (701—774 AH/1300—1373 CE) is one of the most widely consulted commentaries on the Qur’an. The following extracts are taken from the abridged version published in a second edition by Darussalam, Riyadh in 2003.

Ibrahim’s Emigration, the Test of the Sacrifice of Isma’il, and how Allah blessed Him

[1] Allah tells us that after He helped His close friend Ibrahim, peace be upon him, against his people, and after Ibrahim gave up hoping that they would ever believe, despite all the mighty signs that they had witnessed, he emigrated away from them, and said: “Verily, I am going to my Lord. He will guide me! My Lord! Grant me (offspring) from the righteous”, meaning obedient children, in

compensation for his people and relatives whom he had left. Allah said: “So We gave him the glad tidings of a forebearing boy.”

[2] This child was Isma’il, peace be upon him, for he was the first child of whom glad tidings were given to Ibrahim, peace be upon him, and he was older than Ishaq. The Muslims and the People of the Book agree, and indeed it is stated in their Book, that Isma’il, peace be upon him, was born when Ibrahim, peace be upon him, was eighty-six years old, and Ishaq was born when Ibrahim was ninety-nine years old. According to their Book, Allah commanded Ibrahim to sacrifice his only son, and in another text it says his firstborn son. But here they falsely inserted the name of Ishaq. This is not right because it goes against what their own Scripture says. They inserted the name Ishaq because he is their ancestor, while Isma’il is the ancestor of the Arabs. They were jealous of them, so they added this idea and changed the meaning of the phrase “only son” to mean “the only son who is with you”, because Isma’il had been taken with his mother to Makkah. But this is a case of falsification and distortion, because the words “only son” cannot be said except in the case of one who has not other son. Furthermore, the firstborn son has a special status that is not shared by subsequent children, so the command to sacrifice him is a more exquisite test.

[3] “**And when he (his son) was old enough to walk with him**”, means, when he grew up and started to go with his father and walk with him, for Ibrahim used to go every so often to check on his son and his mother in the land of Faran (i.e. Makkah), to see how they were doing. It is said that he used to ride on al-Buraq, travelling there swiftly, and Allah knows best. It was reported from Ibn ‘Abbas, peace be upon him, Mujahid, ‘Ikrimah, Sa’id bin Jubayr, ‘Ata’ Al-Khurasani, Zayd bin Aslam and others that “And when he (his son) was old enough to walk with him” means when he became a young man and was able to work as his father did.

[4] “**And when he (his son) was old enough to walk with him, he said: ‘O my son! I have seen in a dream that I am slaughtering you. So look what you think!’**”: ‘Ubayd bin ‘Umayr said, “The dreams of the Prophets are a revelation.” Then he recited this Ayah: “He said, ‘O my son! I have seen in a dream that I am slaughtering you. So look what you think!’” He told his son that in order to make it easier for him, and also to test his patience and resolve, at a young age, in obeying Allah and obeying his father. “**He said: ‘O my father! Do that which you are commanded ...,’**” meaning, “obey the command of Allah and sacrifice me.”

[5] “**If Allah wills, you shall find me of the patient,**” meaning “I will be patient and will seek the reward for that with Allah.” He, may peace and blessings be upon him, believed in what had been promised. Allah said: “And mention in the Book Isma’il. Verily, he was true to what he promised, and he was a Messenger, (and) a Prophet. And he used to enjoin on his family the Salah and the Zakah, and his Lord was pleased with him” (Q 19:54-55).

[6] “**Then, when they had both submitted themselves, and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead**”: means when both of them had pronounced the Shehadah and remembered Allah – Ibrahim because he was about to offer a sacrifice, and Isma’il because he was about to die. Or it was said that “submitted themselves” means that they submitted and followed the command of Allah; Ibrahim obeyed the command of Allah, and Isma’il obeyed Allah and his father. This was the view of Mujahid, ‘Ikrimah, Qatadah, As-Suddi and Ibn Ishaq, and others. The meaning of the phrase “and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead” is: he placed him facedown so that he could slaughter him from behind, and not have to see his face at the time of slaughter, so that it would be easier for him.

[7] Ibn ‘Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, Mujahid, Sa’id bin Jubayr, Ad-Dahhak and Qatadah said: “and he laid him prostrate on his forehead” means, “He turned him upside down on his face.”

Imam Ahmad recorded that Ibn ‘Abbas, may Allah be please with him, said, “When the rituals were enjoined upon Ibrahim, peace be upon him, the Shaytan appeared to him at the Mas’a and raced with him, but Ibrahim got there first. Then Jibril, upon him be peace, took him to Jamrat Al-‘Aqabah and the Shaytan appeared to him, so he stoned him with seven pebbles. Then he appeared to him at Jamrat Al-Wusta and he stoned him with seven pebbles.

[8] Then he laid him prostrate on his face. Isma’il, peace be upon him, was wearing a white shirt, and he said, “O my father, I do not have any garment in which I can be shrouded apart from this; take it off me so that you can shroud me in it.” He started to take it off, then he was called from behind: “O Ibrahim! You have fulfilled the dream!” Ibrahim turned and saw a fine, horned, white ram. Ibn ‘Abbas said, “We used to look for similar types of rams.” Hisham mentioned this Hadith at length in Al-Manasik.

[9] **“We called out to him: ‘O Ibrahim! You have fulfilled the dream!’”** means “the purpose of your dream has been fulfilled by your laying down your son to sacrifice him.” As-Suddi and others said that he passed the knife over Isma’il’s neck, but it did not cut him at all, because a sheet of copper was placed between them. Ibrahim was called at that point, and it was said: “You have fulfilled the dream!”

[10] **“Verily, thus do We reward the doers of good”** means “this is how We deal with those who obey Us in things that are difficult for them; We make a way for them a way out.” As Allah says: “And whosoever has Taqwa of Allah, He will make a way for him to get out (from every difficulty). And He will provide him from (sources) he never could imagine. And whosoever puts his trust in Allah, then He will suffice him. Verily, Allah will accomplish his purpose. Indeed, Allah has set a measure for all things” (Q 65:2-3).

[11] On the basis of this Ayah and this story, some of the scholars of Usul have stated that it is valid for a ruling to be abrogated before anyone is able to act upon it – unlike some of the Mu’tazilah. The evidence for this is obvious, because Allah commanded Ibrahim, peace be upon him, to sacrifice his son, then He abrogated that and pointed out the ransom. The purpose of His command had been primarily to reward His close Friend for his patience and resolve in sacrificing his son. Allah says: **“Verily, that indeed was a manifest trial”**, meaning, it was clearly a test when he was commanded to sacrifice his son, so, he hastened to do it, in submission to the command of Allah and in obedience to Him. Allah said: “And of Ibrahim who fulfilled all that” (Q 53:37).

[12] “And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice.” It was reported that Ibn ‘Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, said, “A ram which had grazed in Paradise for forty years.” Imam Ahmad recorded that Safiyyah bint Shaybah said, “A woman from Bani Sulaym, who was the midwife of most of the people in our household, told me that the Messenger of Allah sent for ‘Uthman bin Talhah, may Allah be please with him. ‘On one occasion,’ she said, ‘I asked ‘Uthman, “Why did the Prophet call you?” He said, “The Messenger of Allah said to me, ‘I saw the horns of the ram when I entered the House (i.e. the Ka’bah), and I forgot to tell you to cover them up. Cover them up, for there should not be anything in the House which should distract the worshipper.’” Sufyan said, “The horns of the ram remained hanging in the House until it was burned, and they were burned too.

[13] This offers independent evidence that the one who was sacrificed was Isma’il, peace be upon him. The Quraysh had inherited the horns of the ram that Ibrahim sacrificed, and they had been passed down from generation to generation, until the Messenger of Allah was sent. And Allah knows best.

**Reports which state that the One Who was to be sacrificed was
Isma'il, and that this is correct without a Doubt**

[14] Sa'id bin Jubayr, 'Amr Ash-Sha'bi, Yusuf bin Mihran, Mujahid, 'Ata' and other reported from Ibn 'Abbas that it was Isma'il, peace be upon him. Ibn Jarir narrated that Ibn 'Abbas said, "The one who was ransomed was Isma'il, peace be upon him. The Jews claimed that it was Ishaq, but the Jews lied." It was reported that Ibn 'Umar said, "The sacrifice was Isma'il." Ibn Abi Najih said, narrating from Mujahid, "It was Isma'il, peace be upon him." This was also the view of Yusuf bin Mihran. Ash-Sha'bi said, "It was Isma'il, peace be upon him, and I saw the horns of the ram in the Ka'bah." Muhammad bin Ishaq reported from Al-Hasan bin Dinar and 'Amr bin 'Ubayd from Al-Hasan Al-Basri that he did not doubt that the one of the two sons Ibrahim was commanded to sacrifice was Isma'il, peace be upon him.

[15] Ibn Ishaq said, "I heard Muhammad bin Ka'b Al-Qurayzi say, "The one whom Allah commanded Ibrahim to sacrifice of his two sons was Isma'il. We find this in the Book of Allah, because when Allah finishes the story of the one of the two sons of Ibrahim who was to be sacrificed, He then says: '**And We gave him the glad tidings of Ishaq – a Prophet from the righteous,**' and 'So We gave her glad tidings of Ishaq and after Ishaq, of Ya'qub' (Q 11:71). He mentions the son and the son of the son, but he would not have commanded him to sacrifice Ishaq when He had promised that this son would in turn have a son. The one whom He commanded him to sacrifice can only have been Isma'il." Ibn Ishaq said, "I heard him say that often."

[16] Ibn Ishaq reported from Buraydah bin Sufyan bin Frawah Al-Aslami that Muhammad bin Ka'b Al-Qurayzi told them that he mentioned that to 'Umar bin 'Abd Al-Aziz, may Allah be pleased with him, when he was Khalifah, while he was with him in Syria. 'Umar said to him, "This is something about which I have never given any thought, but I see that it is as you say." Then he sent for a man who was with him in Syria, a Jew who had become a Muslim and was committed to Islam, and he thought that he had been one of their scholars. 'Umar bin 'Abd Al-'Aziz, may Allah be pleased with him, asked him about that. Muhammad bin Ka'b said, "I was with 'Umar bin 'Abd Al-'Aziz. 'Umar said to him, 'Which of the two sons of Ibrahim was he commanded to sacrifice?' He said, 'Isma'il, by Allah, O Commander of the Faithful! The Jews know this, but they were jealous of you Arabs because it was your father about whom Allah issued this command, and the virtue that Allah mentioned was because of his patience in obeying the command. So they denied that and claimed that it was Ishaq, because he is their father.'"

[17] 'Abdallah bin Al-Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal, may Allah have mercy upon him, said, "I asked my father about which son was to be sacrificed – was it Isma'il or Ishaq? He said, 'Isma'il.'" This was mentioned in *Kitab Az-Zudh*. Ibn Abi Hatim said, "I heard my father-in-law say, 'The correct view is that the one who was sacrificed was Isma'il, peace be upon him.'" He said, "And it was narrated that 'Ali, Ibn 'Umar, Abu Hurayrah, Abu At-Tufayl, Sa'id bin Jubayr, Al-Hasan, Mujahid, Ash-Sha'bi, Muhammad bin Ka'b Al-Qurayzi, AbuJa'far Muhammad bin 'Ali and Abu Salih, may Allah be pleased with them all, said that the one who was to be sacrificed was Isma'il." Al-Baghawi said in his Tafsir, "This was the view of 'Abdallah bin 'Umar, Sa'id bin Al-Musayyib, As-Suddi, Al-Hasan Al-Basri, Mujahid, Ar-Rabi' bin Anas, Muhammad bin Ka'b Al-Qurayzi and Al-Kalbi" This was also reported from Ibn 'Abbas and from Abu 'Amr bin Al-'Ata'.

[18] “And we gave him the glad tidings of Ishaq – a Prophet from the righteous”: having given the glad tidings of the one who was to be sacrificed, who was Isma’il, Allah immediately follows that with mention of the glad tidings of his brother Ishaq. This is also mentioned in *Surah Hud* (11:71) and in *Surat Al-Hijr* (15:53-55). “A prophet” means from him there will come a righteous Prophet.

[19] “We blessed him and Ishaq. And of their progeny are (some) that do right, and some that plainly wrong themselves”. This is like the Ayah, “It was said, ‘O Nuh! Come down (from the ship) with peace from Us and blessings on you and on the people who are with you, but people to whom We shall grant their pleasures (for a time), but in the end a painful torment will reach them from Us” (Q 11:48).